THE Reconstructionist

Vol. X. October 20, 1944 Heshvan 3, 5705 No. 12

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LILLIAN REZNICK OTT is a poet and writer of note who has previously contributed poetry to *The Reconstructionist.*

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THE Reconstructionist

Vol. X. October 20, 1944 Heshvan 3, 5705 No. 12

EDITORIALS

THE JEWISH BRIGADE ENCOUNTERS THE JEWISH "SIEGFRIED LINE"

AFTER five years of heart-rending delay, the Jewish Agency has finally been granted its request that a Jewish fighting force be established. The original plan called for a Jewish army; the British have compromised, sanctioning the creation of a brigade. The difference is one of size; there is no essential difference in significance. The formal acknowledgment of the right to a Jewish Brigade may be interpreted as acknowledgment of two important facts: 1) that the "forgotten ally"—the thousands of enlisted Palestinians—is no longer forgotten; 2), that the Jews of Palestine, and those who look to Palestine as their future home, are, and of right ought to be, regarded as a nation on the same plane as the other nations united in fighting against nazism and tyranny.

This interpretation is clearly justified by the decision to utilize the *magen david* as the emblem of the Brigade, and to staff the force with Jewish officers. One may even say that the interpretation is justified by the nature of the opposition to a Jewish fighting force heretofore, on the part of the British and on the part of the anti-Zionists, who rightly saw in it an official recognition of the validity of Zionist aspirations.

Whether or not the British are prepared to take the next steps in the near future, to complete the process of setting up a Jewish state, remains to be seen; but that the men in the Brigade will do honor to the emblem they bear, there need be no doubt. They have already displayed such remarkable heroism and resourcefulness that their qualifications as fighters are no longer in question.

Now we are faced with the reverberations on this side of the Atlantic, coming, as usual, not from the American army, not from the avowed anti-Semites, but from the "well-wishing" assimilationists and anti-Zionists who are frankly alarmed by the new developments. So eager are they to defeat the whole purpose of the Brigade that they resort to breeding suspicion and antagonism. It is not surprising that the *New York Times* should take the lead.

In the issue of Friday, September 30, the "Topics of the Times" column views with great dread the setting up of the "so-called Jewish Brigade." The writer begins with an eloquent description of

Yom Kippur observances on the many battlefields of the war, and then proceeds to enumerate the dangers of the Brigade. "It can seriously misrepresent them (the Jews). It can plaster them with the label of separatism. It can set up barriers between them and their non-Jewish fellow-citizens. . . . It will be a plea of guilty to the long standing charge that the Jew is a foreign body in the national organism. . . . The hate-mongers who specialize in the International Jew will have a fine new text."

It is interesting, but also infuriating, to note that the writer not once makes mention of the fact that the Jewish army (or brigade) idea originated with the Zionists, that the base of the Brigade is to be Palestinian, or that stateless Jews who have been deprived of any "national organism" through which to fight Hitler will be given their inalienable right to fight for freedom. The writer carefully avoids telling the history of the whole movement, and even leaves room for the implication that the Brigade has been created by the Jews and not by the British.

By failing to make mention of these facts, the writer in the *Times* does the very damage which he contends the Brigade would do. He summons up the spector of the international Jew. Certainly, if there were no Palestine and no national aspiration, the Jewish Brigade would seem to fall into the category of a Catholic army or a Protestant army, neither of which, as he correctly says, exists. If a brigade composed solely of members of a religious denomination were set up, his objection would be understandable. But the *New York Times* writer refuses to recognize the existence of a Jewish national body even when the British, who are not too noticeably pro-Zionist, indirectly declare it to exist

To be sure, the men in the Brigade will not number millions and will not "represent" the four millions of American Jews, or the three millions of Russian Jews; but certainly, the *New York Times* does not measure the right of a group to exist by its size, for in the very same issue of the *Times* another editorial writer pens a paean to San Marino, that tiny state of less than fifty thousand, which boasts of an army of 900. In creating the Brigade, the British have apparently decided to ignore the obstructionist tactics of our assimilationist Jews. We hope that in the steps yet to be taken these anti-Zionist Jews will get the same treatment.

THE Z.O.A. CONVENTION

THE 47th annual Z.O.A. Convention, which will be held at Atlantic City, October 14-17, meets at a critical period in the history of the Zionist movement. For before the 48th Convention takes place, the war in Europe may well be over, and decision with reference to Jewish aspirations in Palestine announced. Already rumors have been spread that a solution to the problem of Palestine has been reached, and that some kind of partition plan is contemplated. There undoubtedly will be other rumors of other solutions of the Jewish problem in Palestine. We are not in a position to tell whether there is any basis of truth to these rumors, whether a solution has been agreed upon, or is still in the process of formulation. Our duty, however, remains clear and unmistakable. So long as no solution has been announced, we must press with vigor and boldness our demands for the abrogation of the White Paper and the establishment of a Jewish Commonwealth in Palestine, and do everything in our power to mobilize Jewish and world opinion to that end. We must not permit our-

selves to be swayed by rumors, or to accept partial or unsatisfactory solutions. We must remain steadfast and uncompromising in our demands for a Jewish Commonwealth. The first task of the 47th Z.O.A. Convention must be to rouse its membership to bold and determined action and to knit the Z.O.A. into a disciplined and powerful body.

The 47th Convention will witness the largest assemblage of Z.O.A. delegates in its history. The Z.O.A. now has almost 120,000 members, having practically doubled its membership during the past year. This makes the Z.O.A. the largest Jewish organization in the United States, if not in the world. If the Z.O.A. is to take a place in Jewish life commensurate with its size and importance, it will have to clarify for itself, more carefully than it has done hitherto, its relation both to Palestine and to American Jewish life.

It is heartening to learn that a drive has already been launched to raise a Cultural Extension Fund of $250,000 for an expanded program of activities, to include the inauguration of a series of radio programs, the furtherance of Zionist youth camps, the organization of a department of education, the establishment of Zionist societies on college campuses and the establishment of a center for a Hebrew Theatre and allied arts. This is a recognition of the fact, as stated by Dr. Israel Goldstein in one of his presidential messages, that "Zionist activity nationally must be expanded to nourish the cultural and educational needs of American Jewry." The Z.O.A. has a function to perform in the cultural replenishment of American Jewry. The 47th Convention will be called upon to rise to the need of the hour, to make sure that the fund will be oversubscribed and the cultural work launched speedily.

UNRRA AND THE JEWISH REFUGEE PROBLEM

IT is gratifying to note that joint proposals were presented to the Policy Committee of UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration) by all the Jewish organizations concerned. Included in the united representation were the World Jewish Congress, the American Jewish Conference, the Agudath Israel, the American Jewish Congress, the Canadian Jewish Congress and the United Jewish Refugees and War Relief agencies of Canada. The point stressed by the Jewish representation was the need of treating the problem of Jewish refugees and displaced persons differently from that of others. The Committee of UNRRA which received the proposals accepted the proposition that Jews originally of enemy or ex-enemy nationalities were entitled to relief along with nationals of the United Nations, both in countries liberated from the enemy and in enemy territory occupied by the United Nations. But a further proposal, concerning the resettlement of Jewish refugees, it regarded as beyond its jurisdiction.

The general policy of the Committee was to repatriate "persons obliged to leave their country or place of origin or former residence or who have been deported therefrom by action of the enemy because of race, religion, or activities in favor of the United Nations." But repatriation would be no solution of the problem for Jews who have fled or been deported from countries like Poland and Rumania where, even before the rise of Hitler to power, anti-Semitism was virulent and the Jews oppressed. Possibly the situation in these countries with respect to the Jews may improve after the war, but it seems more probable that it may deteriorate even further because of the eco-

nomic disorganization which follows in the wake of war. To repatriate Jewish refugees or deportees would, therefore, in many instances, be anything but a blessing. Their situation is obviously not at all to be compared with that of Gentile refugees and deportees for whom repatriation would mean restoration to lands whose populations acknowledge them as their own kin and are solicitous for their welfare. What these displaced Jews need is clearly not repatriation but resettlement. The Policy Committee of UNRRA, however, considered all action looking to resettlement as in the province of the Inter-governmental Refugee Committee rather than in its own. What action, if any, that Committee will take remains to be seen.

The problem presented to the UNRRA Conference by the representatives of the Jewish organizations is important not only in itself but in its implications. It illustrates the mischieveousness of the doctrine held by many prominent Jews that, since Jews are part of the body politic of the nations with whom they reside, they are differentiated from the rest of the population only in religion. If that were so, then the acceptance of the principle of freedom of religion by all nations after the war would solve the whole Jewish problem. Jews are differentiated from others in fate as well as in faith. In fact to the extent that Jews have a faith in common, that faith represents their interpretation of the spiritual significance of their experience as a people. A Jewish religion that ignores the reality of common Jewish secular interests, cannot function as *Jewish* religion; it cannot build up morale for Jewish living. It is fortunate that, in presenting Jewish needs before UNRRA, our Jewish organizations did not act on the assumption that the only common interests of Jews lie in the realm of religion.

REALITIES AND VALUES

THE NATIONAL COMMUNITY Relations Advisory Council (NCRAC), comprising the principle national organizations engaged in Jewish defense work as well as eighteen local Community Councils or similar organizations, has come out strongly for a permanent FEPC. Following the plenary session of the Council, its chairman, David Sher, wrote letters to Senator Elbert D. Thomas, chairman of the Committee on Education and Labor, and Congresswoman Mary T. Norton, chairman of the House Committee on Labor, declaring the NCRAC and its constituent organizations to be "firmly convinced that the establishment of a permanent federal agency vested with sufficient power to insure fair employment practices in industry will be of great benefit to American democracy." This is something that we have long advocated. There may be division of opinion on the wisdom of certain proposed legislation to outlaw anti-Semitism, on the ground that it may create more evils than it can remedy, but there can be no two opinions among decent people on the desirability of protecting all racial and religious minorities against economic discrimination. That is a responsibility of democratic government. In principle, this responsibility has been recognized by the establishment of the present FEPC. But that was a war measure and, with the reconversion of industry to a peace-time basis, its good work is in danger of being undone. We Jews owe it not only to ourselves to combat economic discrimination, but also to our Negro fellow-citizens and to American democracy in general.

THE LEADERS OF BOTH PARTIES have promised to keep anti-Semitism and other appeals to racial or religious prejudice out of the current political cam-

paigns. Open appeals to anti-Semitism are considered bad taste—and bad politics. But the utterance of vicious innuendoes the import of which can always be denied is not easily controlled. The attempt to smear the Political Action Committee of the C.I.O. and the candidates it favors by calling attention to Sidney Hillman's "rabbinical training" or his foreign birth display the Hitlerite technique of letting latent anti-Semitic prejudice fill in the blanks in one's argument. We are glad to see that Hillman has had the candor to address himself to what is insinuated and not only to what is stated by his opponents, and to say: "Red-baiting and Jew-baiting go hand in hand. . . . It is not surprising that Hitler has for years been calling Mr. Roosevelt a Jew, that the native American fascists have been screaming about the 'Jew Deal' and that the Hearst-McCormick-Patterson Axis rarely misses an opportunity, when discussing P.A.C., to drag in the fact that I am a Jew and was born in Lithuania. . . . And I don't apologize to anybody for it." Well spoken, Sidney Hillman!

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Sir Clifford Heathcote-Smith, representative of Great Britain on the Intergovernmental Committee for Refugees, speaking in Rome to a J.T.A. correspondent, prophesied the future disappearance of anti-Semitism in liberated Europe. He pointed out that anti-Semitism died a sudden death in liberated Italy as soon as fascism and nazism were defeated there. We should like to share Sir Clifford's optimism, but we suspect that he is indulging in wishful thinking. If Sir Clifford were not a British member of the Intergovernmental Committee we would suppose that his wishful thinking was inspired solely by his desire to have his faith in the essential goodness of human nature vindicated. As it is, though we should like to judge him and all men *lekaf zekut* (inclining the balance in their favor), we cannot dismiss a surmise as to the motivation of his remark which is not exactly to his credit. May not his wishful thinking seize on every optimistic omen to justify the unpardonable inactivity of the Intergovernmental Committee in regard to the resettlement of Jewish refugees? Is he not seeking to salve his British conscience, to condone the shameful role of the British representation on the Intergovernmental Committee in insisting on the exclusion of Palestine as a possible place for Jewish refugee settlement? There will be no anti-Semitism after the war; so what is all this fuss that Jews make about a Jewish refugee problem?

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Every year, at the opening of the Hebrew Union College sessions, Dr. Morgenstern, president of the College, delivers a lecture; and frequently he takes that opportunity to air anti-Zionist views. What happened to him this year we do not know, but something undoubtedly happened. We can't believe our eyes; maybe the whole thing is a mistake, or maybe the incomplete report in the Jewish Telegraphic Agency release left out some vital sentences. At any rate, here are some of Dr. Morgenstern's words: ". . . there is absolutely nothing un-Jewish in the theory of a revived Jewish nation or commonwealth in Palestine. . . . To such a program for Palestine . . . no one . . . has the slightest right to object. (Dr. Morgenstern then points out some of the difficulties involved.) "This theory of a Jewish Commonwealth in Palestine any American Jew . . . may . . . endorse wholly . . . or withhold endorsement completely . . . without qualifying . . . his Americanism. . . ." The primary aspiration and duty of American Jews, he adds, is the

"upbuilding of a living, virile, *creative Judaism* here in America (our italics) . . . a truly Jewish way of life."

▼

THE JEWISH WAR VETERANS, meeting in New York recently, showed some of their old fighting spirit, the kind for which they won acclaim during the first World War. Coming upon the heels of the American Legion convention, the Jewish War Veterans' convention was faced with a challenge, for at the earlier meeting of the Legion a resolution had been passed, urging the deportation of all refugees immediately after the war, and the end of all further immigration to the United States until the unemployed number no more than one million. The Jewish War Veterans retorted with a vigorous resolution reaffirming the need for America's assuming its traditional role of haven for the oppressed and the disinherited. We hope that other organizations will express their views with the same courage. We are not here discussing the merits of the immigration question; we are hailing the forthrightness of the Jewish War Veterans.

▼

THE ECONOMIC PROBLEM OF the returning soldiers need not be viewed as a government problem alone, nor as an individual problem alone. Forward looking religious leaders are seeing it as a group or church problem, and are preparing to aid their co-religionists in a practical way. News comes form the Church of the Latter-Day Saints (Mormon) in New Mexico, to the effect that a large ranch has been bought by the Co-operative Security Corporation, an agency of the Mormon Church, which will be divided and sold *at cost* to returning veterans. This brings the cost of each unit down considerably. Undoubtedly, arrangements will also be made to help the veterans acquire their units. Surely, other groups might give thought to their own returning soldiers. Imagine how Jewish soldiers would feel about the Jewish community if it were to become a vital factor in their economic reintegration!

From Theocracy to Democracy

By EUGENE KOHN

THAT Jewish life is subject to evolution and reconstruction is generally conceded by thinking Jews. It is obvious to them also that the needs of the Jewish people in our day cannot be satisfied by applying standards designed for a time when Jewish life was segregated and autonomous. They will admit that modern-minded Jews cannot accept as historic fact the supernaturalist version of the origin of the Torah nor believe in its immutability. But the direction in which Judaism should evolve and the methods by which changes in Jewish life should be effected—on these questions there is wide divergence of opinion. This is even true of those who accept the Reconstructionist definition of Judaism as "an evolving religious civilization."

Recent Discussions on Authority in Jewish Life

Discussions on the subject of authority in Judaism which have appeared in some of the issues of *The Reconstructionist* reveal this divergence of opinion. Most of the writers who have participated in them, discard the traditional rationale for authority in Jewish law and observance. But they seem reluctant to abandon the

methods of interpreting, developing and applying Jewish law which are based on that rationale. They discard supernaturalism, but insist on treating the Jewish codes *as if* they were of supernatural origin. They involve themselves in all sorts of contradictions and anomalies because they fail to recognize a necessary implication of our abandonment of supernaturalism. That implication is that the Jewish community of the future must be a democracy, not a theocracy.

At this point a definition of the distinction between the two is called for in order to meet the possible objection that theocracy and democracy are not necessarily contradictory. Etymologically, theocracy means government by God or by divine law. In that sense, all good government would be theocratic, since all just laws honestly administered must be assumed to express the will of God. But in the sense in which we use the term, we mean by *theocracy* a government based on the assumption that the law by which it rules has been supernaturally revealed and is immutable, and that the persons through whom authority is exercised are entitled to unquestioned obedience so long as they exercise their authority within the limits that divine law sets for them. By *democracy* we mean a government which derives its authority explicitly from the consent of the governed. Its authority is a delegated one, and it acts merely as the agent of the people in the exercise of its delegated powers.

According to this definition, from the time that the Torah was promulgated by Ezra and Nehemiah in the 5th century B. C. E. as the word of God and the fundamental law of the Jewish Commonwealth down to the Emancipation about a century and a half ago, the Jewish community was a theocracy; since the Emancipation, it has been "halting between the two opinions" of theocracy and democracy; for the future, it should, I maintain, commit itself finally and definitely to democracy.

For in our day the rationale for theocracy has been undermined. The majority of the Jewish public probably no longer accepts as valid the belief that the Torah was literally dictated to Moses by God. The very rabbis who protest against the general violation of Jewish law no longer accept this belief. Yet, with few exceptions, they insist on the same prerogatives for the law and its rabbinic interpreters as when it was believed to be the direct word of God. Thus Dr. Agus, although he does not commit himself to a supernaturalist philosophy of life, takes Dr. Gordis to task for intimating that the laws prohibiting shaving and the wearing of a mixed linen and woolen garment might be abrogated by permitting them to become obsolete. (Authority in Jewish Life, The Reconstructionist, Vol. IX, No. 20). From the standpoint of traditional Judaism, Dr. Agus is undeniably right. But if one does not accept the traditionalist standpoint, his assertion that the prohibitions of *shaatnez* and of shaving must remain eternally in force merely render that standpoint absurd. If, according to tradition, the law cannot be amended even in respect to provisions that hardly anybody sees any sense in or wants to conform to, why cling to tradition? Does the Law exist for Israel or Israel for the Law? Theocracy implies the latter; democracy maintains the former.

Dr. Gordis, whose latitudinarianism Dr. Agus criticises, also involves himself in contradictions by reason of wanting to maintain theocratic forms of authority while denying the ideological basis of theocracy in supernaturalism. He senses more keenly than Dr. Agus the need for a democratic rather than a theocratic rationale for Jewish authority. He conceives as the basis of authority the concept of *Kelal Yisrael* or Catholic Israel.

From the point of view of Catholic Israel, that may be regarded as authoritatively Jewish which has been sanctioned by the conscience of Israel as a whole. Dr. Gordis rejects as inadequate Dr. Schechter's interpretation of Catholic Israel. According to Schechter, any law that has been sanctioned by a consensus of Israel in the past must, thereafter, remain a part of normative Judaism. Were one to apply that standard, no rule, however valueless for our day, could ever cease to be binding. Dr. Gordis acknowledges an apparent dilemma in the attempt to base authority on such a consensus. He writes:

"If by Catholic Israel, whose practices determine what is binding in Judaism, we mean the majority of modern Jews, then we might as well eliminate the Sabbath, the festivals and the dietary laws, since they are violated by most Jews today. If, on the contrary, we subsume under the category of Catholic Israel the observant Jews only, the doctrine means a retention of the status quo, for, by definition, an observant Jew is one who observes the law unchanged."

He tries to resolve the dilemma by proposing a new definition of Catholic Israel according to which that term "is not coextensive with the Jewish people, nor . . . restricted to those who observe the law unchanged" but "embraces all those who observe Jewish law in general though they may violate one or another segment of it. Dr. Gordis, of course, cannot tell us how large a segment of Jewish law may be violated without its violation excluding one from participation in *Kelal Yisrael.* There are always those who, to quote a celebrated "Irish bull," would be willing "to sacrifice a part, nay even the whole, of the constitution in order to save the remainder."

But his position is untenable for yet another reason. In spite of his effort to base authority on a democratic rationale, he fails to recognize one of the most important implications of democracy, in his handling of Jewish tradition. He virtually makes tradition and the will of the living generation of Jews coordinate elements in determining the norm of Jewish life. He thereby violates a democratic principle in order to cling to a relic of the theocratic idea. His argument reminds one of G. K. Chesterton's paradoxical justification of orthodoxy. In one of his essays Chesterton says something to this effect: Democracy insists that nobody shall be deprived of his suffrage by reason of the accident of birth; tradition insists that nobody shall be deprived of it by reason of the accident of death. This may be an interesting epigram but its fallacy is not difficult to expose. It overlooks the fact that the living generation has to be governed by the law under conditions as they are and not as they were at the time the law was promulgated. It might very well be that the dead, who had a share in formulating the law would themselves move for its amendment if they were alive and were required to abide by it in present-day circumstances. Dr. Gordis, however, makes no provision for the amendment of the law except by nullification and obsolescence. This completely vitiates the following analogy which he suggests to justify his theory:

"Now, theoretically democracy is, in Lincoln's classic definition, 'government of the people, by the people, for the people.' Practically, however, no democratic government expresses the will of the entire people, but only of those sufficiently interested in it to exercise the franchise and obey the laws."

It must be noted, however, that *democracy demands that the exercise of the franchise be open to all adult citizens who are required to obey the law. But the theocratic tradition in Judaism makes no provision for any franchise, since the*

author of the law is conceived to be God not man. Until such provision is made, the transition from a theocratic to a democratic form of authority cannot be complete. On the basis of the theocracy, Dr. Gordis has no justification for permitting the modification of the law by nullification or obsolescence; on the basis of democracy, he has none for excluding from Catholic Israel any Jew who wishes to identify himself with the Jewish people and is willing to observe its laws *provided he has a share in making or amending them.* Unless we can assure him of such a share, we have no right to make the observance of specific laws a test of his Jewish loyalty and their violation a ground for his exclusion from *Kelal Yisrael.*

The motive behind the reluctance of men like Dr. Agus and Dr. Gordis to accept the implications for Jewish law of the change from a theocratic to a democratic community is a worthy one. It is the fear that so radical a break with tradition would result in a wholesale abandonment of Jewish norms and a loss of important spiritual values which should be retained in our Jewish heritage. Unless Jewish life is rooted in tradition, it has no permanence; its very identity is in constant danger of being lost. In view of the observable deterioration in Jewish religious discipline in our day, such apprehensions cannot be lightly dismissed.

But is that deterioration the result of the application of democratic principles to the question of authority? Is it not rather a consequence of our failure to achieve democratic Jewish community life? Has not the anachronistic insistence on forms and methods taken over from the theocratic regime of the past been in large measure responsible for the contempt in which Jewish law is now held by so many. People used to democracy very naturally lose interest in a law that is deemed to be independent of the will of the people and not to require the consent of the governed. The gingerly and fumbling way in which scholarly rabbis have dealt with the need of change in Jewish law, their tolerance, for example, of such injustices as the legal inequality of the sexes merely because tradition has no precedents for establishing their equality, is not calculated to foster respect for its authority in a modern community.

The truth is that, at present, we have neither theocracy nor democracy in Jewish life; we have anarchy and chaos. But the way out of anarchy does not lie in the direction of a return to theocracy; it lies in the direction of consistent and thorough-going democratization. We are in entire agreement with Rabbi Ario S. Hyams when he says:

"What then can preserve the continuity of the Jewish civilization? Only the reorganization of the Jewish people and the responsiveness of our trained scholars to the needs of the people can make the readjustment of Jewish law a continuation of the past. The present must be different enough from the past to enable it to live in the future, and *those who would contribute to that future must evince a faith that the vitality of the Jewish people will carry it through the change.*" (Kelal Yisrael — a Democratic Concept, The Reconstructionist, volume IX, number 10).

We may assume that the Jewish people are not degenerate and that the Torah tradition contains values which are relevant to modern life. On the basis of these assumptions, it is reasonable to believe that, given conditions of democratic freedom and democratically established authority, the Jewish community will avail itself of its cultural heritage for the enhancement of its own life. The fact that we do not accept the traditional codes as immutable and eternally binding does not mean that we would ignore their content.

It means merely that we recognize the right of the living Jewish community, after due consideration, to retain what it wants to retain, to discard what it wants to discard, and to enact what it wants to enact, of Jewish law.

The acceptance of this principle will undoubtedly alter the very scope and range of that law, particularly in the Diaspora where Jews do not live exclusively under Jewish law as the Jews of Palestine may look forward to doing in a Jewish commonwealth. How the change from a theocratic to a democratic Jewish community would affect the range of Jewish law will become clearer after we envisage the demands of democracy on the structure of the Jewish community.

Democratizing Jewish Communal Life and Law

A democratic Jewish community would, in the Diaspora, have to be based on four fundamental principles: inclusiveness, voluntarism, constitutionalism and federation.

Inclusiveness demands that an opportunity for participating in the government of the community be open to every Jew who desires to identify himself with it and work for its preservation. Although, in view of the religious character of Jewish civilization, Jewry in the Diaspora would function mainly as a *religious* community, nevertheless non-conformists and unbelievers must not be excluded from it as long as they wish to maintain their connection with it. There must be no excommunication because of heresy, as would be appropriate in a theocratic community. The power of excommunication would have to be applied only against persons whose conduct jeopardizes the security and freedom of the community as a whole.

The principle of *voluntarism* implies the right of any person of Jewish descent to elect not to be a member of the community. In that event, he would, of course, forfeit any claim to the services which the community provides for its members, and any claim to speak in its behalf.

The principle of *constitutionalism* implies a clear definition, by a constituent assembly, of the functions of the Jewish community, of the rights and duties of the individuals and organizations affiliated with it, and of the organizational set-up and methods of administration of communal affairs.

The principle of *federation* implies that any organization of Jews for purposes which include or involve the perpetuation of the Jewish community and its enhancement should be given fair representation in the governing body of the community. It is assumed that any Jew who is interested in belonging to a Jewish community will also be interested enough in its functional activities to belong to one or another of the organizations that conduct such activities.

In addition to local Jewish community organizations, Jewry should also be organized nationally and internationally on the same general principles. The detailed working out of these principles is, of course, a long range program. It cannot be effected by mere fiat. It must eventuate as the result of an evolutionary process involving negotiation, experimentation and compromise. But an understanding of what we wish to arrive at by this process, the transformation of Jewry from a theocratic to a democratic community, should help us determine its direction.

From the above principles of community organization, we begin to see the new scope of Jewish law and some of the necessary limitations of Jewish legal authority. Problems of social relations within the Jewish community which affect all

Jews alike would come legitimately within the scope of Jewish law. Such law would be backed by social sanctions enforced by the community in ways that are consistent with the laws of the country, state and municipality. The regulation of marriage and divorce — in conformity with the laws of the country but also with the standards of ethical behavior which the Jewish community may wish to impose on its adherents — would naturally be subject to procedures determined by Jewish communal authority.

But we can no longer expect, nor do we desire, the imposition of ritual observances or prohibitions by the community. That would violate the democratic principle of freedom of conscience. It would be inappropriate even in a Jewish state or commonwealth and certainly in a voluntarist Jewish community such as Jewry would constitute in the Diaspora. Consequently, the development of Jewish ritual would have to be left to individuals and to voluntary organizations of like-minded persons. The present tendency to irresponsible disregard of religious disciplines would, however, be checked, since these organzations would be free to impose what conditions they wish on their membership, provided these do not violate the constitutional prerogatives of members. The constitutions of such organizations might be registered with the all-embracing community organization and the rights and duties of members under them be backed by community sanctions.

Out of such communal efforts at developing norms of Jewish behavior there would emerge new codes of practice, new instruments of adjudication, and new methods of bringing social pressure to bear on offenders against community standards of decency. These together would constitute a new *halakhah* or way of Jewish living. In seeking answers to the concrete problems that arise, competent guidance would be sought from those learned in the Jewish legal and ethical tradition, but that guidance would have to take the form of expert advice; decisions must be made by the authorities set up by the people through their elected representatives.

Democratizing Jewish Education

In the field of Jewish education, no less than in that of Jewish law and Jewish communal organization, the shift from theocracy to democracy must make itself felt. In the past, Torah has meant a body of doctrine which the child — and for that matter the adult, in courses designed for him — was expected to accept on the authority of tradition. True, we no longer compel acceptance of the authority of tradition in our schools by inflicting corporal punishment on those who express doubt. But in the education of the child, and even in that of the adult, we assume that the religious tradition inherited from the past is perfect and seek to persuade the student to accept it. What we have failed to do is to impart the heritage of Israel in a way that makes the pupil, child or adult, feel that he is expected to take a creative, not merely an acquiescent and conforming, part in Jewish life. The pupil's judgment is rarely exercised on the desirability of continuing, revising or replacing old forms of Jewish observance. His imagination is rarely employed in the development of new rituals.

To be sure, in the education of the child, obedience and conformity must, within limits, be required. Young children are too immature and too ignorant for independent judgment. But the objective to be constantly kept in mind must be to strengthen the child's capacity for democratic participation in the evolution of Judaism. He must be given increasing responsibility for the conduct of his own religious life in proportion with his

growth in intellectual power, emotional self-control and Jewish knowledge. In how many courses, including those designed for adults, is Judaism presented not from the point of view of apologetics, but as a problem in Jewish living which the students themselves have to work out under guidance of the teacher? It is notable that, even in our theological seminaries and schools of higher Jewish learning, few courses bring techniques of research and study to bear on the solution of pressing contemporary problems. It is always tacitly assumed that the classics of the past have authoritative answers to all problems; all that is needed is to con over and over again the sacred texts. *"Hafakh bah vehafakh bah dikhola bah."* ("Go over it again and again, for it contains everything.")

Democratization and The Zionist Movement

Even in our Zionist activities, we seem not completely to have made up our mind on the choice between theocracy and democracy. To the credit of Zionism it must be said that it was the first great movement in Jewish life which, more or less consciously, took one important aspect of Jewish tradition out of its theocratic setting and translated it into democratic terms. The idea of the return of Israel to Palestine and to national status had been involved, before the rise of Zionism, with the belief in a personal messiah, the rebuilding of the Temple, the restoration of the hereditary priesthood and the Davidic dynasty, all of them parts of the supernaturalist conception of Jewish destiny. Zionism took the idea of the *geullah* out of its theocratic context and democratized it. Henceforth the Jewish people, acting on its own initiative, without waiting for a sign from heaven or authorization by any divinely constituted authority, was to be its own messiah, to effect its own restoration to the land, and to endeavor to establish its own democratic Jewish commonwealth in Palestine.

But even in Zionist ranks, the realization of the revolutionary implications of Zionism has frequently been impeded by groups that cling to the theocratic outlook. In Palestine, Jewish law has not been modified to abolish such abuses as the inequality of the sexes before the law, polygamy, child marriages, etc., because of the traditional theocratic concepts with which the rabbinic tribunals of Palestine operate. There is no Jewish civil law governing these important relations that is not controlled by the rabbinate. But the rabbinic tribunals, as at present constituted, are a theocratic institution. Doubtless, if and when the Jews will be enabled to set up a Jewish commonwealth in Palestine, such matters will no longer be left to rabbinic authority exclusively. The principle of government by consent of the governed will be insisted on. But democracy in Palestine will be achieved only after considerable struggle against a sort of Jewish clericalism advocated by the Agudat Yisrael and, in somewhat lesser degree, by Mizrachi. On the other hand, Jewish radical elements in Palestine will have to forego some of their present antinomian tendencies in order that at least the social relations of Jews to one another in the Jewish commonwealth and standards of Jewish family life be subject to common democratic controls. In ritual matters, there would have to be full freedom of conscience with the state intervening only to protect the right of individuals and groups to the free expression of their religious interests.

In the Diaspora, Zionism has evaded the problem of democratization almost completely, along with most other problems of Jewish life in the Diaspora. It has only shown an interest in the democratiza-

tion of Jewish life when certain small groups or individuals have presumed to speak in the name of the Jewish people to the detriment of Zionism. But Zionists who appreciate the revolutionary implications of Zionism as a movement for "auto-emancipation," for the redemption of Israel by Israel itself, will not halt at merely trying to establish a democratic commonwealth in Palestine. They will be no less concerned with establishing a democratic Jewish life in the Diaspora within the frame of a voluntarist federated Jewish community.

Democratizing Our Theology

Finally, in the formulation of our religious beliefs, we must reckon with the change from theocracy to democracy. In the theocratic view, God is conceived as a personal Sovereign whose decrees are given to men without their having any share in the exercise of His sovereignty. This may seem to be contradicted by such *agadot* as the statement that "the *tzaddik* (saint) decrees and the Holy One, blessed be He, fulfills the decree." But the contradiction is more apparent than real. The statement is predicated on the assumption that no *tzaddik* would "decree" anything contrary to the revealed Torah, for if he did, he would cease to be a *tzaddik*. His role is that of a nobleman in the court of an absolute monarch; he wields influence but has no share in the King's sovereignty.

But if we are to derive from our faith in God encouragement for improving the social order in which we live, *we need the sort of religion that recognizes the democratic process itself as the assertion of God's sovereignty.* We must think of God himself not as a personal Ruler — though we may figuratively refer to Him as King — but as the Power manifest in man's quest for a just, peaceful and happy life. We must have faith that, if men are given a chance to make the most of their lives in fraternal cooperation, they will achieve salvation, will experience the worth, the holiness, the God-liness of life. In the democratic process, man reaches the sublimest heights of freedom and responsibility, the fullest expression of ethical personality, the most complete realization of the image of God in him.

The protagonists of theocracy oppose this apotheosis of the democratic process. In their opinion it is objectionable because it gives no "absolute" ground on which to stand. It seems to equate the "voice of the people" with the "voice of God" as though "the people" could not err. But that is not true, for the reason that democracy, like the Kingdom of God, is never at any particular time fully realized. There always are conflicts of interest between individuals and between groups. But the ideal of democracy implies that the *true* interests of men coincide. These *true* interests in their *true* relations are the absolutes that give meaning and value to our relative ideals; in their determination of human destiny resides the sovereignty of God.

To the extent that we achieve the maximum of freedom and cooperation attainable in our society, to that extent, we "perfect the world under the kingdom of the Almighty." But God's sovereignty operates entirely through the wills of human beings in search of salvation. Whatever frustrates men in their quest for salvation, even if it is enjoined by a code once conceived as divine and immutable, must be abolished. Obedience to religious authority is not enough; sharing responsibility in the sovereignty of God is the higher task that democratic religion imposes on us.

Beyond Comprehension . . .

By LILLIAN REZNICK OTT

If I make bold to seek
Behind Thy silent mists,
I do so not out of irreverence,
But out of awe.
I, who have waited centuries
For my turn,
Even as fools before me,
Still seek to learn,
Within my allotted moment,
Thy infinite mysteries.

Oh, ask me not
What I wish to know,
Whether it be the source of rain
Or the virtue of human pain;
I know no more than this,
Living, I dread to cease
Ere I can understand
The whispering of the leaves.

'Tis said, Oh, God,
That Thou art everywhere,
Along the river's bank
As upon the deserts bare,
And that Thou hearest, e'en
The wounded sparrow sigh;
And yet Thy Name's alike
Upon the lips of those who kill
And those who die.

Then how shall I distinguish
The admonishing voices of the sea
From the terrifying shrieks
Of men whose graves
Lie within its Depth?
Or be sure that the birds' song
Is a paean of praise, and not,
A protest against wrong?

'Tis said, Oh, God,
That Thou art everywhere,
In the wilds of jungles dense
As upon the ice-lands bare
And that Thou hearest e'en
A withered rosebud sigh;
And yet Thy Name's alike
Upon the lips of those who defend
And those who betray.

Oh, how am I to comprehend
The message of the wind
Above the silent tempests of echoes
That wail in the night.
How am I to reconcile
The martyr's tear
With the tyrant's smile?

'Tis said, Oh, God
That Thou art everywhere,
Over fertile valley lands
As upon mountains bare;
And that Thou hearest e'en
The still-born kitten sigh;
And yet Thy Name's alike
Upon the lips of those who build
And those who destroy.

Oh, how shall I ever divine
The paradox of putrid flesh
And fragrant pine,
Or even attempt to compare
The hope of dawn
To the widow's despair,
Or the inspiration of a melodic tone
With the futility of a starving
Orphan's groan?

Oh, Thou, who art Supreme,
I seek no more than a dream
Ephemeral as a rainbow's hues
And no more lasting
Than a sun-set's view,
Ere I pass,
Even as fools before me,
Into Thy infinite mysteries.

The Problem of Ritual Observance— The Mitzvot Maasiyot *

By THEODORE FRIEDMAN**

FOR this discussion, we shall understand by *mitzvot maasiyot* such traditional observances as those associated with *kashrut,* the Sabbath and the festivals. These observances, as is apparent to all who are familiar with Jewish life in America, are being discarded by so many that they are in danger of becoming obsolete. To be sure, among the first generation of Jewish immigrants, in the ghetto sections of some of our large cities, the *mitzvot* are still observed in the traditional way. But wherever Jews have been exposed for any length of time to the influences of the American environment, these *mitzvot* tend to lose their hold, and the number of Jews in whose life they play no part whatsoever is alarmingly large and is constantly growing. The problem is one that has been with us ever since the Emancipation. The need of the Jews to participate in the economic and cultural life of the countries that had granted them citizenship rendered Jewish observance difficult. Moreover, modern thought tended to undermine the traditional beliefs on which observance had been based.

The first attempt to deal with the problem was that of Reform Judaism. To facilitate adjustment to modern conditions it advocated the abolition of those observances which might stamp the Jews as an alien element in the body politic. From their point of view, the only legitimate function of *mitzvot maasiyot* was to serve as symbols of universal ethical values. They therefore retained the affirmative observances connected with the Sabbath and the holidays, but discarded the observance of *kashrut* and of the prohibitions contained in Jewish ritual law.

Conservative Judaism has grappled with the problem, at least theoretically. Conservative Jews admit the need for evolution or for evolutionary changes in Jewish ritual, but they feel so strongly the need for continuity with the past that they will not permit any change which has not been sanctioned by the practice of *K'lal Yisrael* or Catholic Israel. They never seek a legalistic sanction for a modification of observance except where such modification has already been widespread. Instances of such changes are the introduction of the organ and family pews in the synagogues.

It is apparent from the foregoing that the criteria of Reform Judaism give a rationale for the observance of a meager minimum of *mitzvot,* while Conservative Judaism offers no criteria for evaluating the relative importance of observances or any method of modifying them.

The problem that confronts Jews who wish to live a Jewish life in a modern environment may be stated as follows: They feel that they cannot do without *mitzvot maasiyot.* At the same time they cannot observe them as transmitted by tradition. Some method must therefore be found by which Jewish religious observances can function without detriment to other vital interests of Jews as human beings.

Ritual Observance Indispensable

The *mitzvot maasiyot* are indispensable

* Paper read before the Annual Conference of the Jewish Reconstructionist Foundation, held in New York on June 30th and July 1st, 1944.

** In collaboration with the other members of the Policy Committee of the Conference, Mordecai M. Kaplan, Samuel Dinin, Ira Eisenstein and Eugene Kohn.

to Jews who wish to lead a Jewish life for two reasons: (1) They are the principal means by which the individual Jew can express his at-oneness with the Jewish people; (2) they are the principal means by which he keeps himself aware of his spiritual attitude to life and the world. These two functions of the *mitzvot,* while logically distinct, are psychologically so closely related that they are inseparable. A religious attitude to life is one that stresses man's need to transcend his individual interest and feel himself a responsible member of society, responsible to his Creator for the use he makes of his own powers. He is aware of his debt to past generations, and of his obligations to generations yet unborn. For a Jew, therefore, a religious attitude to life includes the desire to share in the abiding life of Israel. In wanting to live as a Jew, he does not want to contribute merely to the survival of the Jewish people, but also to the realization of the spiritual ideals that have motivated Jewish history. The observance of the *mitzvot* is, therefore, at one and the same time, an expression of the Jewish will to live and an expression of the Jewish will to salvation, or to make the most of life. They are means, not only of national survival, but of national and personal consecration.

A study of Jewish history emphasizes for us the importance of the *mitzvot* not merely for Jewish survival, but as means of Jewish religious expression. Even those movements within Judaism, such as Hasidism and Mysticism that stressed the personal elements of religion, did not deprecate the *mitzvot,* but rather gave their performance an immediacy and urgency unknown even in Rabbinic Judaism. Medieval Hasidism produced a whole literature giving the deeper meanings of the ritual observances. Those interpretations were such as to increase the zeal for the performance of the *mitzvot.* New introductory formurae to be recited before the performance of a *mitzvah* were originated. These were intended to strengthen the spiritual concentration and devotion involved. A Jewish religiosity independent of the *mitzvot* would be an altogether new phenomenon in Jewish life. The abandonment of ritual does not imply, as some are prone to believe, the accentuation of spirituality. The experience of Reform Judaism is instructive at this point. Dispensing with most of the ritual observances has not helped Reform Judaism to cultivate a more spiritual attitude toward life. The loss of piety on the part of the modern Jew is as much the result of the breakdown in ritual observance as it is its cause.

Jewish Culture No Substitute for Observance

Granted that the *mitzvot* are a means of expressing oneself as a Jew and of expressing one's spiritual attitude toward life, are there not other and perhaps more suitable means available? Indeed, there are groups in Jewish life who are as concerned as we are with the retention of Jewish identity, but who urge for this purpose such means as language, literature, art, music, etc. All these and similar modern substitutes for the traditional *mitzvot* are, however, inadequate for two reasons.

In the first place, none of these proposed means can possibly become universal among Jews. Among every people cultural pursuits are the preoccupation of a comparatively small group. Certainly, today in America, all our experience points to the fact that a functioning knowledge of Hebrew, Jewish literature and Jewish culture generally will be limited to a small minority. The means for expressing our at-oneness with the Jewish people must be fairly universal; otherwise it becomes the mark of an inner circle,

not of a people. Mere cultural activities lack the essential character of being symbols of Jewishness. The fact that practically all Jews observe certain *mitzvot,* circumcision, for example, creates a social expectation, an environment conducive to their continued observance. What is true of circumcision is true, in varying degrees, of other *mitzvot.* While the social expectation making for the observance of the *mitzvot* may be gradually lessening, none can deny that social expectation is a factor to be reckoned with. None of the proposed substitutes can count on that kind of environmental influence.

Secondly, the means offered suffer from the fact that they are relatively new. They do not express our awareness of our life's being a continuation of that of our Jewish ancestry. We want to feel ourselves not only members of the contemporary Jewish group, but also legitimate heirs to the Jewish past. Modern Jewish culture began in the era of Emancipation and is largely characterized by the revolt against traditional observance and the tendency to secularism which are typical of that period. It cannot, therefore, adequately express the desire of the Jew to feel himself spiritually at one with his forebears who lived before the Emancipation. But even if modern Jewish culture were less antagonistic to traditional religious standards, it would nevertheless be no substitute for the traditional observances, because it is a relatively new product. This is not said in any spirit of deprecation; it is merely stating a fact. Any new form of Jewish self-identification, created *ad hoc,* would necessarily lack association with historical Jewish religious values. Let it be said at once that we favor new forms of Jewish religious expression. Any new ritual, if it were to have value for us, would incorporate our contemporary religious ideals. Its value would be its contemporaneity. The sense of continuity with the history of Israel, however, comes primarily through those ritual observances that derive from our historic experience.

It may be argued that all these proposed means of Jewish self-identification enjoy one supreme advantage over the *mitzvot maasiyot.* They bring to the Jew no puzzling illogicalities. They are all activities that possess intrinsic value. All this may be readily granted, and yet it must be recognized that means of identification do not depend for their proper functioning on their inherent rationality. Symbols can serve their purpose with complete adequacy, arbitrary though they be. All that is demanded of a symbol of identification is the easy recognition of what it represents. There is no logical relationship between the colors and design of a flag and the country it represents, nor is one's name necessarily expressive of one's character.

The Need for Modifying Observance

All that has been said about the indispensability of Jewish observance stresses the danger involved in its abandonment. Sharing in the political, social and cultural life of America, the American Jew is likely to find his identity as a Jew completely submerged. As a member of a cultural minority who must nevertheless share in the culture of the majority, the average Jew can devote only a minor portion of his time and energy to Judaism. Unless that portion be characterized by distinctive forms and practices, Judaism is liable to be swallowed up by the majority culture without leaving a trace of its former existence or making any impress on the milieu into which it has been absorbed.

This danger which has been with us since the Emancipation has been rendered acute in our day by the Nazi assault upon

Judaism and the Jewish people. This has affected different sections of Jewry differently. Some Jews have been so panic-stricken as to seek further flight from everything that is distinctive in Jewish life. To them the entire problem of traditional religious observance, as we understand it, does not exist. Others, in their disillusionment with the Western World, have had recourse to a stunting and stultifying religious obscurantism. Still others, finding that assimilationism is no solution of a Jewish problem, would welcome a degree of Jewish observance, if they were given an adequate rationale for that observance, and if the observance did not involve inordinate sacrifices of legitimate human interests. But when those Jews who would like to return from assimilationism to a more affirmative Judaism are confronted with an intransigent and an authoritarian ritualism, they are rebuffed and baffled. Unless we provide for the modification of Jewish observance in a way that will preserve the values indicated above without demanding a withdrawal from participation in American cultural life, we will be frustrating those Jews who desire to find their way back from assimilation to a loyal Judaism.

Toward a Solution Of the Problem

Mitzvot maasiyot are in need of modification, but they must be so modified as to retain their value as means of experiencing our at-oneness with the Jewish people and our consecration to its ideals.

In their traditional form every detail in their observance is dealt with as subject to the authoritative interpretation of Jewish law. To accept the jurisdiction of the law in this area is effectively to preclude that flexibility which alone can adapt them to actual conditions. The matter need not be argued theoretically. Those who take their stand on the unimpeachable authority of the law and yet profess to be anxious so to interpret the law as to render it workable under present day conditions, have been unable to produce a single significant interpretation of the law to this end. The truth of the matter is that Jewish law, by its own canons of interpretation, is not the pliable instrument it is often described to be. One must go back centuries, if not millenia, to find any genuinely creative adjustment of Jewish law to life. To operate solely with the intrinsic standards of the law is to condemn oneself to sit idly by and watch the disparity between the law and life grow apace.

We must, therefore, create some new procedure which will maintain the continuity of traditional observance while facilitating adaptability. This procedure involves the submission of all problems of ritual observance to the guidance of duly qualified Jewish scholars whose decisions would be accepted as morally binding. The success of this plan will depend upon both the character of their qualifications and the frame of reference within which questions of ritual would be considered. The following three criteria would constitute the necessary qualifications:

1. Such Jewish scholars must have a correct and comprehensive knowledge of the traditional manner and spirit of the observance of Jewish ritual. Heretofore, the studies that have been made of Jewish ritual were oriented toward origins. Important as such investigations may be, they reveal what is after all but a minor segment and, often enough, the least important segment of the long process of use and interpretation through which Jewish ritual has passed. The supposed Babylonian parallel to the Sabbath, for example, sheds little, if any, light on the role the Sabbath has played in Jewish religious life. A preoccupation with origins

and parallels may satisfy the curiosity of the antiquarian but it is not the stuff out of which living realities are built. That is not to say that the history of Jewish ritual must be studied in isolation. Quite the contrary, a comprehensive grasp of the function of ritual in religion and an understanding of the role of symbolism in life generally should serve as the background of such studies.

2. Such scholars must approach Judaism from the historical and evolutionary viewpoint. In this search for an authoritative adaptation of ritual to the exigencies of the present, no help can be expected from those who, to use a current phrase, wish to freeze the status quo. If Judaism is regarded as authoritative revelation, fixed and final in form and practice, all talk of adaptation and revision is futile. Only those who regard Judaism as the "evolving religious civilization of the Jewish people" can make a contribution to the solution of our problem. From the evolutionary point of view, the value of any link in a chain of development consists of its potential or active use for the present. The scholar who sees change at work in the past is temperamentally suited to regard change in the present not as wild aberration but as a legitimate and integral part of the historical process.

3. These scholars must have a realistic understanding of the difficulties involved in maintaining the ritual observances in their traditional form.

This latter qualification raises an important question. For whom are such adaptations and revisions of Jewish ritual intended? Will they have any catholicity of appeal? One must admit at once, that for those, and their number is dwindling rapidly, to whom any change in ritual is unthinkable, any such program as here envisaged would appear a rank repudiation of the Jewish sanctities. Exclusive of that minority, the program could serve as a guide to all Jews, who, in any measure, are prepared to subscribe to a Jewish pattern of living and are ready to make it an integral part of their lives. Such a pattern will call for effort and devotion. The degree to which this devotion will be forthcoming will depend, in large measure, on how thoroughly the exigencies of modern life have been reckoned with in drawing up the program for ritual observance.

Our approach, therefore, to the problem of modifying the Jewish religious observance must be *to call for the establishment of a living authority in the form of a body of qualified scholars in place of the authority of a dead code.* It is premature to organize such a body at the present time. As yet the realization of the need for Jewish observance and of the criteria by which Jewish observances are to be evaluated is not sufficiently widespread. To agitate for such a solution to our problem should, henceforth, be one of the principal functions of our Reconstructionist movement.

We do not presume ourselves to function as the authority which will modify the *mitzvot* and restore religious observance to the place it should occupy in Jewish life. When the time comes, we will, of course, cooperate in establishing such an agency for developing Jewish ritual observances as we have advocated. In the meantime, we can, in addition to propagandizing the need for a modification of religious ritual, make a modest contribution to the development of more adequate norms. In our Fellowship, the problem of how to live Jewishly will raise many questions of observance on which members would like the guidance of Jewish scholars qualified to function on the kind of commission proposed. We should make provision by which questions of this kind can even now be referred to such authorities and receive from them

the mature consideration that they require. The answers given would, to be sure, be authoritative only for those who accept our approach to the problem and are willing to abide by the decisions of a committee of scholars designated by the Jewish Reconstructionist Foundation as being qualified.

DISCUSSION OF THE FOREGOING PAPER

Chaplain Edward Sandrow of the U. S. Army, who had recently returned from a tour of duty in the Aleutian Islands and Alaska, discussed the attitude of Jewish Servicemen to ritual observance. With few exceptions, such observance has little meaning for them; they see no beauty in it nor any necessity for its retention. Their ignorance of Judaism and Jewish life is appalling. This constitutes both an indictment of the system of Jewish education and a censure of the Jewish home. Yet these men wish to be Jews and to be known as such. They can be reached by a proper appeal; they will understand ritual practice if it is related to their every-day life and personal interests. This is the segment of the population to which Reconstructionism must address itself, for, from the ranks of these men, will come many of our future Jewish leaders.

Jewish Servicemen are socially conscious to a greater extent than are their Gentile companions in arms; they can be made religiously aware also.

Chaplain Sandrow approved of the setting up of a commission to evolve a series fo observances adjusted to the needs of our day and bearing the stamp of authority. But he felt that, in order to be authoritative, such a commission should be set up in Palestine, the natural seat of Jewish religious and cultural life. He doubted whether the Diaspora was capable of such an undertaking.

Dr. Kaplan dissented from this view. He held that an attitude toward religious observance based on the conception of Judaism as an evolving religious civilization would have to be brought to Palestine from America and other democratic and scientifically advanced nations. By far the majority of the Jewish population of Palestine come from Eastern Europe or the Orient. A rigid and ebscurantist Orthodoxy characterizes a great part of that population. Their outlook on religion is still supernaturalist and authoritarian. For them Judaism is a revealed doctrine and law, not an evolving civilization. On the other hand, those who have come to Palestine from Eastern Europe and have nevertheless been influenced by Western culture have reacted so violently to the oppressive influence of obscurantist orthodoxy, that they have lost faith in traditional religion and tend to view Judaism with a secularist bias. Where there are two such radically opposed attitudes to Judaism, the evolution of new religious norms of observance which shall be regarded as authoritative becomes exceedingly difficult. But in Western democracies like the United States, the religious and scientific spirit are not commonly held to be mutually antagonistic and the democratic process has habituated people to the principle of diversity in unity. They therefore afford a better opportunity for developing Jewish observance by an evaluation and modification of the *mitzvot* to conform to the needs of the living generation of Jews. Once this process is vigorously at work in America and other countries where similar conditions prevail, it is bound eventually to influence Palestine Jewry as well, and may help in facilitating that synthesis of conflicting ideologies which create such a difficult problem in Palestine today.

The question was raised whether Reconstructionists should concentrate their efforts on securing a modification of Jewish observance for those who still conform to a number of traditional Jewish ritual practices, or should appeal mainly to those who have broken away completely from Jewish religious observance. The consensus seemed to be that effort in each of these directions was equally indispensable. For those who still practice certain observances but find them irksome or meaningless, the process of evaluating the

mitzvot begun with the preparation of the pamphlet, "Toward a Guide for Jewish Ritual Observance" should be continued and applied to additional *mitzvot* which have not yet been dealt with. For those who observe nothing, new and interesting ceremonies should be devised which should serve the double purpose of making those who practice them feel personally involved in the life and destiny of the Jewish people and of making them more God-conscious. By this twofold approach, norms of ritual usage might be established which could be acceptable both to those who are more or less observant of them and to those who are not. For example, persons who are accustomed to observe two days of Holiday in a half-hearted manner might be shown how to observe one day wholeheartedly, while those who observe none might be induced to observe one day if that observance can be made interesting to them.

The desirability of setting up in the United States a commission such as was mentioned in the paper to act as a living authority a "human "Shulhan Arukh" was generally acknowledged. The duty of winning Jews to this approach to the problem of Jewish observance and of facilitating the evolution of Jewish ritual rested, it was agreed, primarily on the rabbinate. But it was felt that this called for a kind of religious leadership on its part of which few rabbis have as yet given evidence. There is need today on the part of the rabbi of a more fundamental grasp of the nature of religion, its psychological roots, its historical development, its relation to all the other aspects of our civilization, than was required of religious leaders in the past. As long as all people accepted the assumption that religion offered a supernaturally revealed way of eternal salvation, it was hardly a problem to induce them to follow that way. A little exhortation, and the interpretation of the tradition according to established norms and precedents were all that was required by way of religious leadership. But in our day, when people no longer know what to understand by religion, when they must be convinced not that an observance is required by the Law, but that there is any Law to which they ought to conform, the problem of religious leadership is infinitely more difficult and calls for a profound grasp of the philosophy of religion and the methods by which religion can fulfill its function of truly sanctifying human life.

Correspondence

ON THE FUTURE OF THE AMERICAN JEWISH CONFERENCE

Sir:

I read your editorial under date of October 6th, 1944 on "The Future of the American Jewish Conference," but I am frankly confused by what it says and what it fails to say.

Obviously the only kind of an Assembly we can have with real authority is one that will be made up of permanent delegates elected or appointed by the local permanent Jewish City Community Councils—provided these enjoy local authority. But this can come only after *all* the national organizations will have disbanded; after the American Jewish Committee, the American Jewish Congress, the B'nai B'rith, the United Synagogue of America, the Rabbinical Assembly, the Joint Distribution Committee, the United Palestine Appeal, the Reconstructionist Foundation, etc. etc. will have disbanded. All I can say is "God speed that day."—But this will take years and years of controversy and readjustment. But if you mean just this, why not say it in plain, honest, direct and simple language?

As to the present delegates, I doubt if they have any authority of any kind to decide on new scopes for the conference. Just what is their mandate? What is their term of office? Are they a self-perpetuating body?

Leon Spitz

We see no reason why *all* national organizations need be dissolved in order to establish a democratic over-all organization of American Jewry. As long as national organizations have a distinct function which does not involve overlapping they should be represented in such a body. Moreover, although the American Jewish Conference, not having been elected as a permanent body may not perpetuate itself as such, there is no reason why it, or any other Jewish organization, may not take the initiative in calling a constituent assembly of American Jewry into being. Being the most representative of all American organizations it would indeed be particularly appropriate for the American Jewish Conference to take the initiative.

—Editors

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